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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF DESIGN

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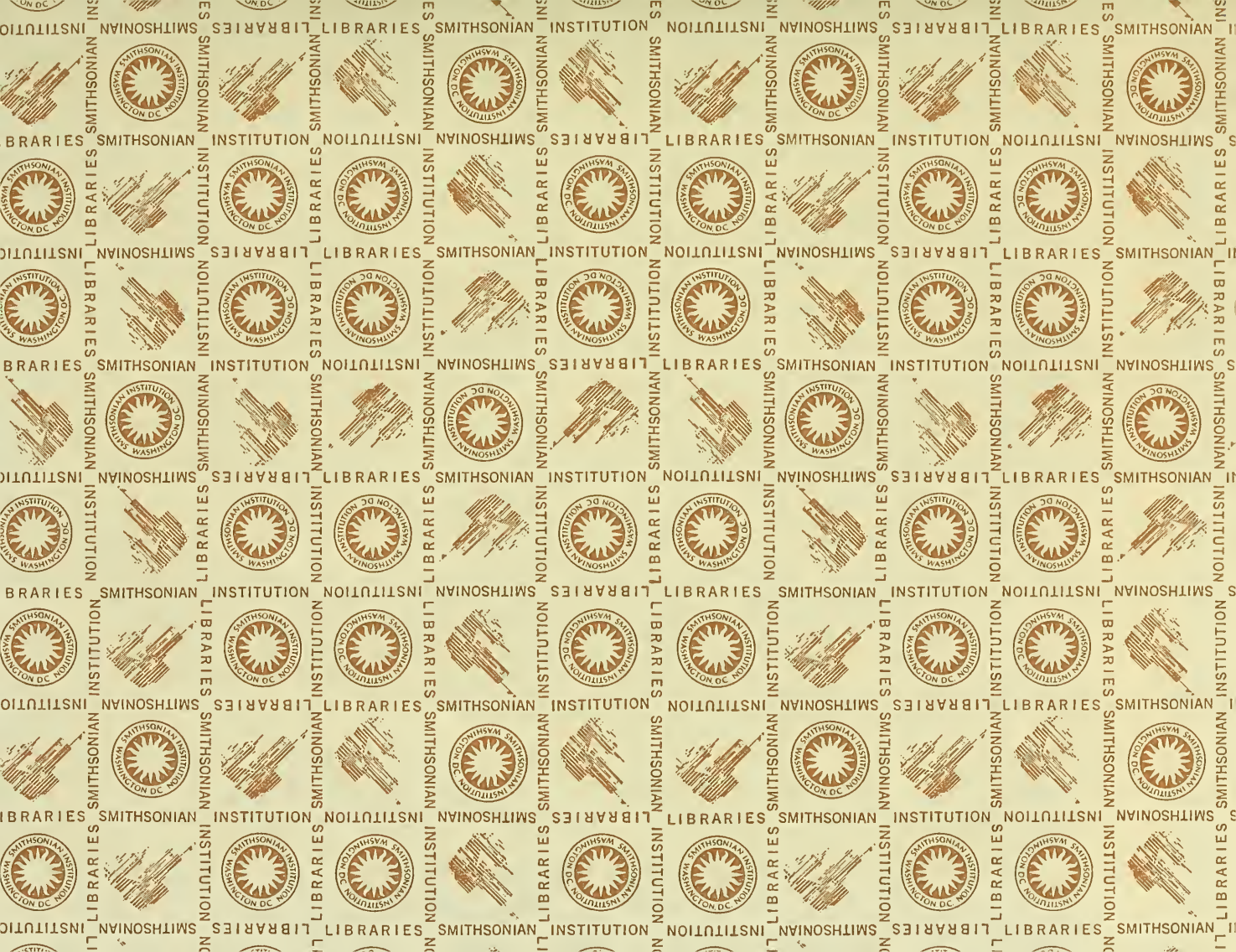
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A National Museum of Design

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design: a definition

Enriching the life of contemporary Man—as a person, a member of society, and above all, a being in Nature—requires a new and broader understanding of design.

Design, in this sense, means that faculty by which men shape matter to a purpose arising from any of an infinite number of human needs and desires. The designed object may be as humble as a paper container, as complex as a computer, as conspicuous as a factory, as large as a city or a region.

Good design has always had to satisfy two requirements. The first is functional: the object should do well that which it is intended to do. The second is esthetic: the object by virtue of its form should possess some quality that is pleasing in itself, apart from the material end which it serves.

Today, there is a third element that has no precedent in history. Design must encompass the whole of human environment. Its ultimate effect on life must be considered in relationship to form, materials, methods of manufacture, and use.

Man necessarily alters his environment whenever he shapes matter to a purpose. The problem now—given quantum leaps in technological efficiency, mass production, and urbanization—is that alterations can be of such a scale as to defeat the initial purpose.

Society must become aware of the possibility of designing itself in harmony with Nature. With half the planet's total population living in cities, and the trend accelerating, we must give as much attention to the synthetic as to the natural environment.

Design is an all-embracing activity. Whether constructive or destructive, it powerfully touches people's lives. Since every component in the man-made environment is the conception and work of someone, design has become one of the most pervasive issues of the human race.

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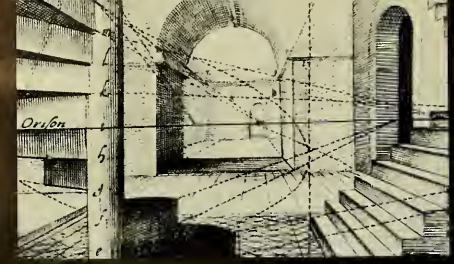
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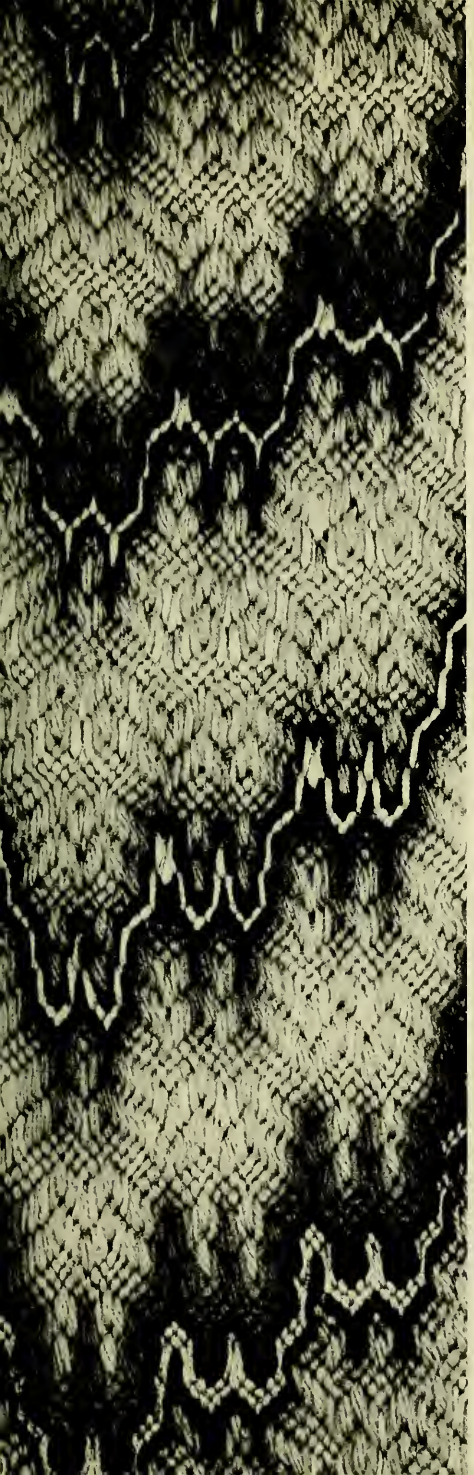


concept

Because design is a vital force in the world, it is essential that we understand its effect on human life and spirit. Among museums, the Smithsonian Institution is uniquely qualified for such an immense study. The Smithsonian was founded 125 years ago for "the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men". It already operates museums in the disciplines that affect design—art, technology, history, and science.

Therefore, as a natural extension of its long attempt to interpret Man, his culture, and his environment, the Smithsonian is creating a new institution, a National Museum of Design. As the only museum in the United States devoted exclusively to historical and contemporary design, it will cover all areas of environmental design—the works of Man—that can be expounded within a museum context.

The Museum will have as its purpose an understanding of Man's creative instincts and of how and to what ends he expresses them to deal with his environmental needs. In this unique program, the Museum's resources, including its collections, will be used to emphasize purpose and process, rather than only the object.

The Museum's primary concern will be the practical, physical, and psychological effect of design on life. Because design is a continuous on-going process, the Museum will have an experimental workshop quality. It will be dynamic, rather than static. People's activities and needs will constantly give it new form.

collections

The new Museum is not intended to spring full-fledged upon the world, without antecedents. Rather, it will be firmly connected with the past by building upon the collection of the former Cooper Union Museum.

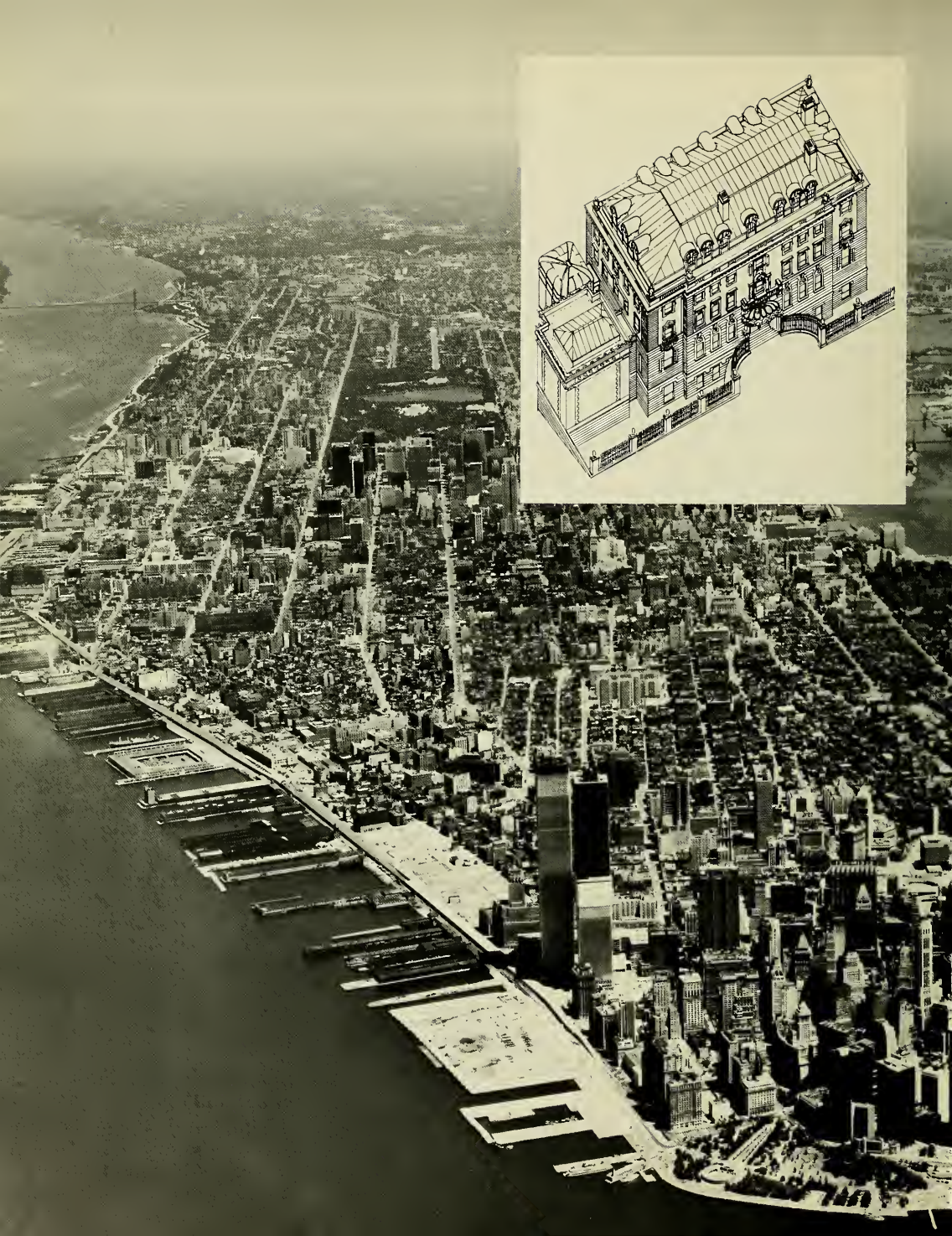
This outstanding collection of decorative arts and design, which was recently saved from dispersal and entrusted to the Smithsonian Institution, is known and respected by specialists and scholars the world over. It was started in 1897 for students in the Cooper Union School and for independent designers by Peter Cooper's granddaughters, the Misses Sarah, Eleanor, and Amy Hewitt.

Spanning over 3,000 years, the collection is well suited to interpret cultures of the distant and recent past. It includes more than 100,000 historical and contemporary objects from all parts of the world, expressing Man's infinite capacity to convert, and sometimes to subvert, his physical environment.

The collection is supported by one of the finest and most complete decorative arts and design libraries in the country and a unique picture archive of more than 600,000 photographs and reproductions. The Library will be expanded to include samples of materials (such as woods, marbles, tiles); pattern design; color materials; and sensory and technological data.

The Museum will have no dead storage areas. Its entire holdings will be available for study at all times with the help of experts. In order to facilitate research, all objects will be cross-indexed by material, technique, and design motif, as well as by artist, period, and historical relevance. An electronic retrieval system will make objects visually accessible and will simultaneously provide all catalogue data.

The important design problems today are not only objects, but entire landscapes, cities, systems, and ecological complexes. Because they do not lend themselves to collecting in the traditional sense, the Museum will supplement its display system with new and varied techniques for recording, preserving, and communicating information about design.



facilities

Because this important new institution must meet the needs of the future as well as those of today, the most imaginative and knowledgeable minds in the fields of design, and of physical and psychological environment have been asked to participate in the Museum's planning.

The Museum will be located in New York City, which is the center of design work and study in America. The site, consisting of the Andrew Carnegie Mansion, an adjoining town house, and gardens, stretches the length of an entire block on Fifth Avenue between 90th and 91st Streets and is in close proximity to a number of the city's important museums and schools.

The Mansion, built at the turn of the century, is under consideration as a landmark. A handsome example of simple and sturdy 18th century revival style, it provides ample space for the Museum's collections and programs.

The buildings lend themselves admirably to showing everyday objects in human scale and in interesting relationships of old and new. Certain areas will be restored to their original state and others that have already been changed through years of use will be renovated to the modern requirements of the Museum.

The Museum will house permanent study collections and libraries; conservation and photography laboratories; a children's environment center and a media center; a museum shop and restaurant; studios, workshops and other study facilities. Remodelling plans include the addition of flexible multipurpose spaces to accommodate exhibitions, film showings, theatrical and other events.

The Museum hopes to provide a common meeting ground for both those who make and those who use design. It will present a lively program of activities for people of all ages and design interests—the general public, local community, students, scholars, and professionals in all areas of design.

objectives

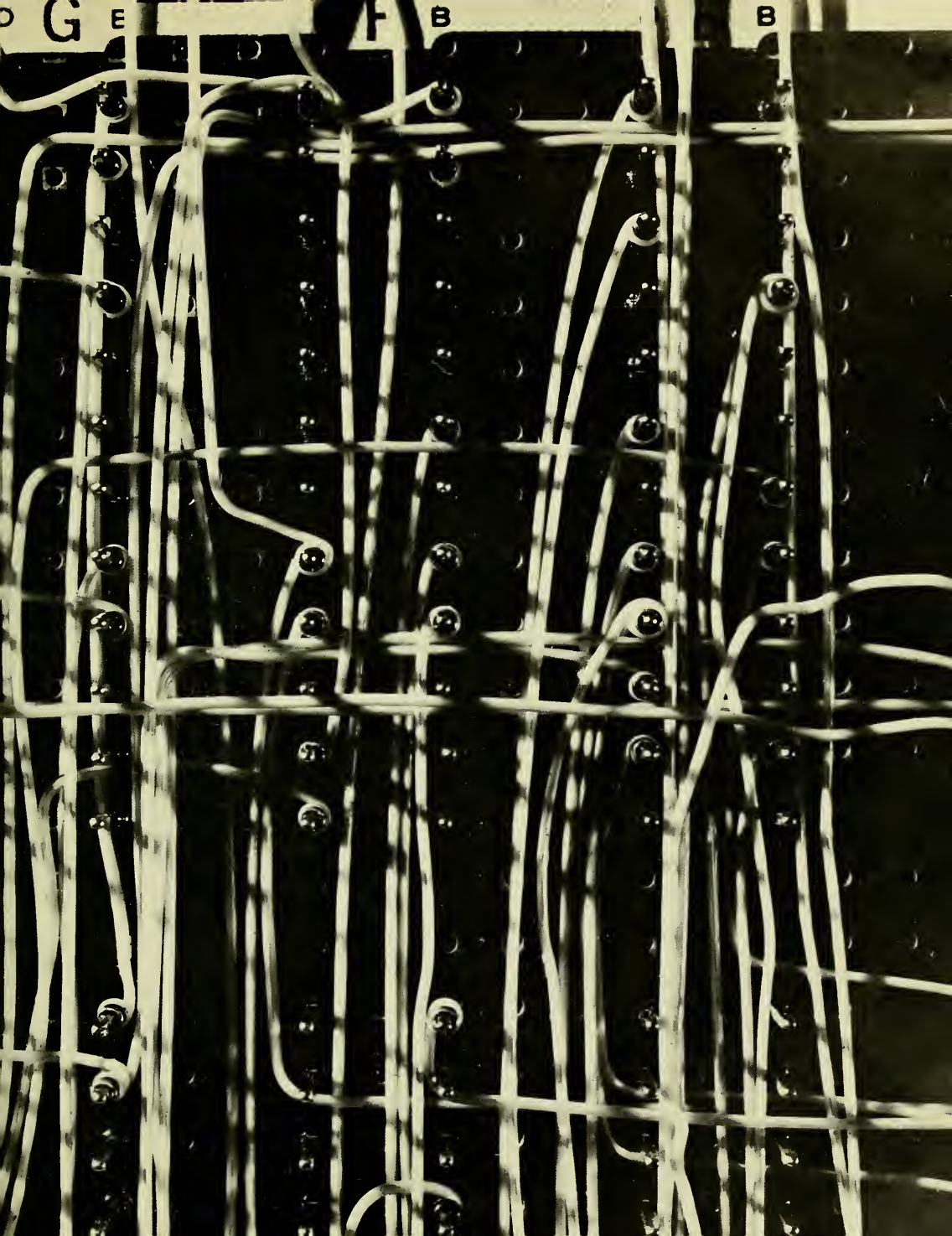
A museum must do much more than simply amass and exhibit extraordinary objects. It must use its resources to enhance Man's understanding of past, present, and future in terms of both society and Nature. It must seek to delight, excite, and involve everyone it can.

Thus, the National Museum of Design, besides fulfilling the traditional roles of a museum, will have the broadest purposes. It will be a museum of life —a place for collected memories, images, and experiences.

Because design can be seen by anyone everywhere, the Museum will attempt to identify areas where needs are not being met. It will perpetually raise questions. The answers may be many and opposite, for truths are relative to the moment and always changing. The Museum will not have an ideology, but will provide a forum where many points of view will be considered.

All who recognize the importance and timeliness of the new Museum are urged to contribute to its support in any way they can. The needs are small when compared to the objectives and their consequences for the present and future welfare of Man.

As a private affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, the Museum receives no government funds and is responsible for its own support. The Museum begins with several major assets: it has been given a new home, it has a renowned collection, and it has the technical and expert resources of the Smithsonian Institution at its disposal. But financial support is needed. An estimated five million dollars will make it possible to convert the property to a modern museum facility, relocate the collections, and develop the services and programs planned.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cover:
Detail of a Pottery Tile
Kashan, Persia, 14th Century
Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution

frontispiece:
Photomicrograph of Lunar Rock—NASA

page 4 and 5: COOPER-HEWITT COLLECTION
Print, Illustration for PERSPECTIVE
by Jan Vredeman de Vries (1527-ca. 1604)
Leyden, Netherlands, 1604

Carved Oak Newel Post
France, 1740-1750

Desk, Padouk Wood Inlaid with Mother-of-Pearl and Metal
Designed by Carlo Zen
Milan, Italy, about 1905

Glazed Earthenware Bowl
Persia, 10th-12th Century

Embroidered Textile, *Bargello* Work
Italy, 18th Century

page 6 and 7: COOPER-HEWITT COLLECTION
Printed Cotton Velvet
Designed by Arthur Wilcock
England, about 1890

Child's Chair of Laminated Walnut
Designed by Charles Eames
New York, United States, 1948

Wrought Iron Grille for a Window
France, about 1650

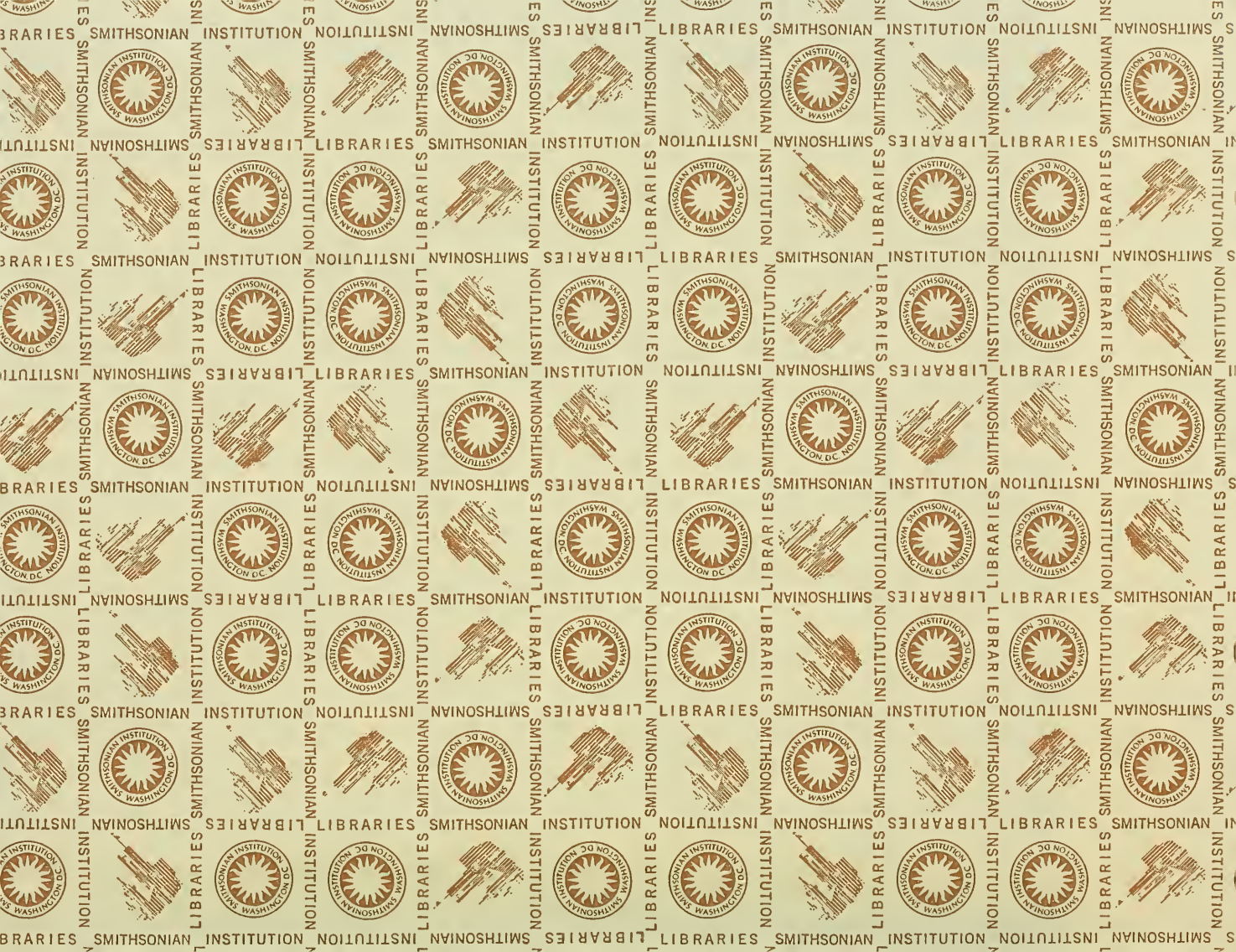
page 8: COOPER-HEWITT COLLECTION
Isometric Drawing of the Carnegie Mansion
Roy Frangiamore (1941-)
New York, United States, July, 1971

page 8 and 9:
Aerial view of Manhattan—THOMAS AIRVIEWS

page 11:
Memory Core Circuit—IBM

Design and Production: Joseph Bourke Del Valle

Smithsonian Institution Washington, D.C. 20560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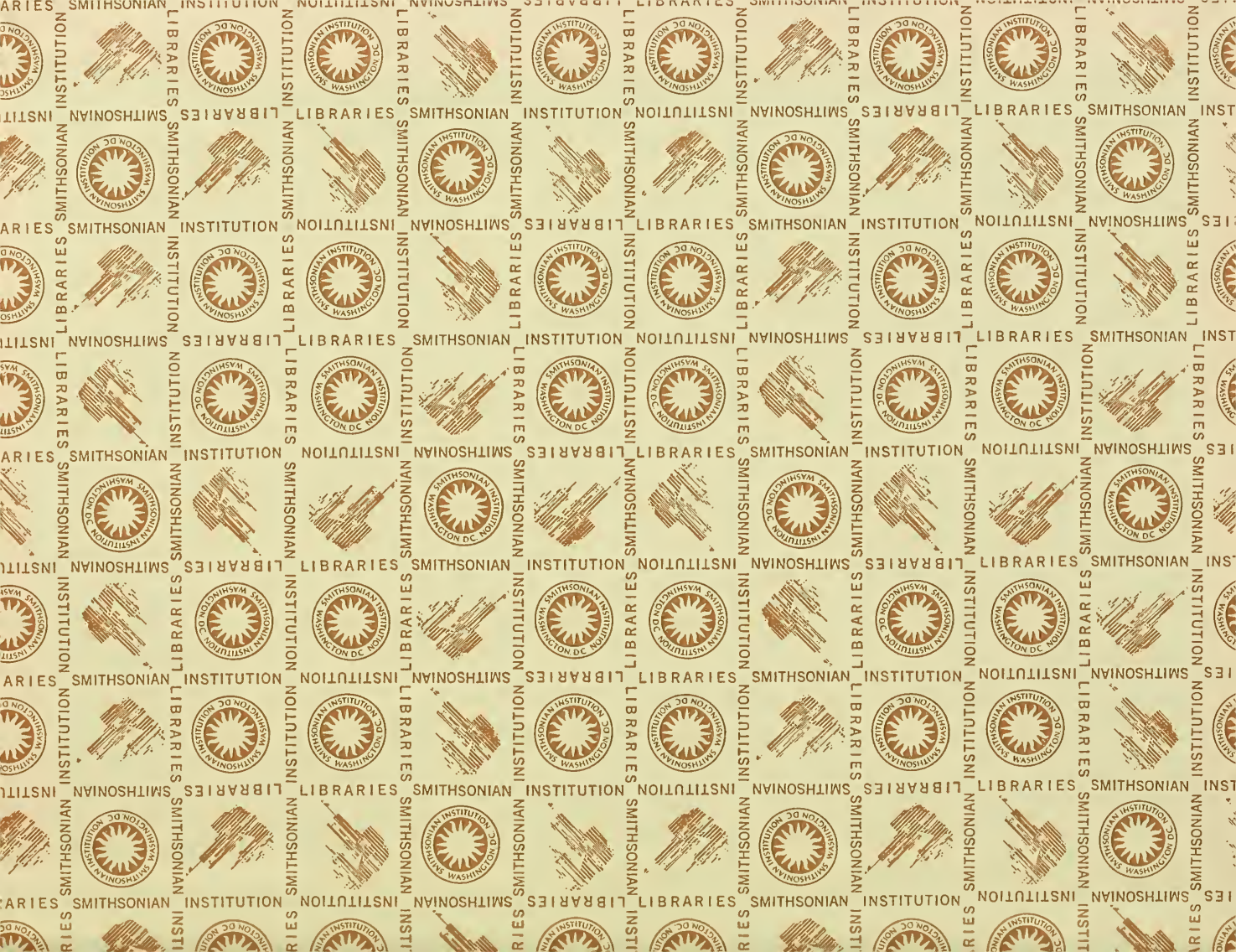
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